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# LISTENING TO STUDENTS' VOICES ON TRANSLATION RELATED EXERCISES IN EFL CLASSES

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**Abstract:**

The use of students' L1 in the EFL class has always been a controversial decision to take. Opponents of the GTM method to foreign language teaching have strongly been against making use of students' mother tongue in any form stressing that it shall be harmful to students and detrimental to learning. Based on different considerations, it is argued that it will be a total waste of students' L2 learning time when using L1. However, the last two decades have witnessed a strong wave of research which highlighted the importance of investing L1 in foreign language classes, especially with beginners. This paper aimed at discovering students' attitudes towards including translation-related exercises as a form of L1 in reading classes in Moroccan middle schools where L1 is officially banned. To accomplish this, 63 students had the chance to experience translation-based exercises then they were invited to complete a questionnaire. Results generally revealed that learners appreciated the exercises and are very positive about including them in EFL reading classes.

**Key Words:** Translation-Based Exercises, Beginners, EFL, Reading.

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## Introduction:

In fact, the use of the mother tongue in EFL classes has always been in the heart of pedagogical debating. Between opponents and proponents, scientific argumentation continues to exist and the heated debate of defending the reintroduction of students' mother language or banning it in L2 contexts has always brought about opposing views. Meanwhile, such persisting controversy shows that this topic is worth-researching. From a general perspective, the present research brings to the limelight the use of translation exercises in EFL classes. More specifically, it investigates the incorporation of translation exercises in L2 reading classes. In terms of objectives, this paper intends to capture students' reactions and views on the inclusion of translation-based exercises in L2 reading. In the literature, it is noted that much has been said about the theoretical side of using L1 in EFL contexts; whereas, less has been done on its practical implementation. In the present paper, focus is exclusively placed on beginner learners of English in Moroccan middle schools. Targeting this specific category of learners stems from the fact that these learners should be treated differently because they are in the early stage of learning English as a foreign language. The significance of this research lies in that it tries to bring novelty as regards the use of translation in foreign language teaching. Hence, beginners' attitudes are investigated based on a practical method of using translation in the EFL class which is completely different from the principles of the widely criticized grammar translation method.

## The importance of the study

The significance of this research lies in that it tries to bring novelty as regards the use of L1 in foreign language teaching. Differently from the way students' mother tongue is invested in FL classes according to the grammar translation method, beginners' attitudes in this paper are investigated based on a practical innovative method of using translation in the EFL class. The importance of this paper consists in suggesting a methodological framework wherein students' L1 can be included in reading comprehension classes. This pedagogical suggestion introduces translation-related activities as a way of making use of L1 in a way which takes into account the criticism addressed to the GTM as regards the incorporation of L1 in L2 classes. From a specific point view, translation exercises are suggested to be guarantee.

## Methodology and procedures

To conduct this research, a quantitative methodology of research which was adopted. However, to base the respondents choices on experiencing, 63 EFL beginners were given the chance to do translation exercises. Within this context, the procedure of data collection witnessed short translation-related activities were inserted in reading comprehension classes during the three phases of the lesson. After 13 classes of experiencing translation exercises, beginners were requested to complete a questionnaire of two sections which included items about beginners' reactions towards the experience of doing translation exercises and their attitudes about including them in L2 reading classes. Data were analyzed using the SPSS and STATA soft-wares. For deeper analysis, the PCA method was applied.

## The theoretical framework and related studies

The use of the mother tongue in FL classes was given much value under the umbrella of the classical method to foreign language teaching, later called the grammar translation method. Translation, as the name of the method tells, has been the backbone of the teaching process and was deliberately made to so for the learning of a foreign language (Larson-freeman, 2000). With much focus of grammar rules and literary texts, the grammar translation method did not pay attention to the communicative aspects of the target language. Hence, the coming of the monolingual and communicative methods to foreign language teaching as a reaction against the principles of the GTM has marginalized the use of the mother tongue in class.Later, it was totally banned believing that it does not suit the

evolution of foreign language learning contexts (Hawks, 2001; PennyCook, 1994; Packet, 2003; Wringe, 1989). The opponents of the GTM have underlined various reasons why translation should not be included in foreign language teaching. Being affected by the recommendations of the communicative approaches to foreign language teaching, translation use was seen as detrimental and harmful to learning because it would develop laziness and dependency in learners and minimize learners' exposure to the L2 in the classroom (Kavaliauskienë and Kaminskienë, 2007).

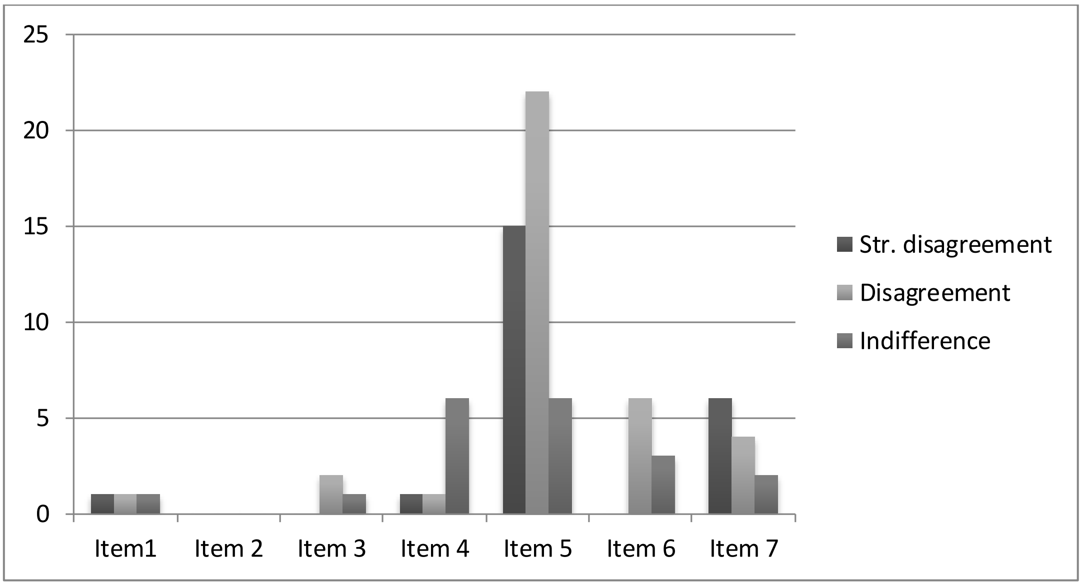
Other reasons of refusing the inclusion of translation in EFL classes emphasized the fact that learners will develop a negative sense of dependency on L1 and will not be able to understand the meaning from the context or the teachers' explanations in class Swift (2006). Stressing the instructions of the monolingual methods to foreign language teaching, the use of the students' L1 has also been rejected for it is believed that it will make the students miss the opportunity of getting exposed to their L2 precious time offered in the EFL classroom Ross (2000). Criticism of using translation in FL classes was also based on the idea that it does not target various aspects of foreign language learning. Duff (1994) in this sense stresses that translation is text-bound and targets only two skills, i.e., reading and writing. He also argues that translation is not a communicative activity because it does not involve oral interaction which makes it a boring activity (Duff, 1994). It is also believed that translation is not a suitable exercise in the initial stages of teaching a foreign language because it can be very challenging and frustrating to students (Muranoi, 2000).

In contrast, for about three decades, scholars' calls for the reconsideration of translation in the EFL classes have been noticeably recorded. In this sense, scholars have showed tolerance towards translation use in EFL classes by highlighting the role which L1 can assume in foreign language teaching (Duff, 1994; Leonardi, 2011). The idea of banning translation in FL classes was criticized. Instead, readopting it in FL was openly advocated as a legitimate pedagogical teaching tool (Harmer, 1991; Ellis, 1992; Ur, 1996). Scholars underlined the importance of L1 for learners along with criticizing the impracticality of banning students from resorting to it. In this regard, Cook (2007) states that"L1 is present in L2 learners' minds whether teachers want it to be there or not. The L2 knowledge is being created in them is connected in all sorts of ways with their L1 knowledge (P.584)".

**Results, Discussion, Conclusion and recommendations**

**Figure 1**

**Levels of respondents' strong disagreement, disagreement and indifference.**




Based on the statistics displayed in figure 1 above, results of this research indicate that high levels of agreement were recorded as regards EFL beginners' reactions towards the translation exercises they did. Based on the weak levels of disagreement and indifference, results show that students express appreciation, to a large extent, towards the experience of doing translation related exercises in reading comprehension classes. Accordingly, it is concluded that beginners', based on their positive reactions, hold a positive attitude towards translation exercises in reading classes. Their positive feedback finds support in the literature in which doing translation exercises is regarded as natural learning practice which is more necessary than the newly invented foreign language teaching activities as argued by Duff (1989) and Buckmaster (2000). Besides, beginners' strong appreciation reflects the need for investing L1 in foreign language teaching and learning and remarkably refutes the idea of disregarding or banning the use of translation in L2 environment (Clanfield and Foord, 2000; Koppe and Kremer, 2007).

Methodologically, getting beginners' feedback on doing translation exercises in reading comprehension classes has been very crucial to discover their overall opinion on a incorporating translation-based activities in L2 reading comprehension classes. In this sense, results revealed that learners have almost totally agreed on the idea of using translation related exercises in the teaching of the reading skill as displayed in table 2.

**Table 1**

**Levels of students' total agreement towards incorporating translation exercises in reading comprehension classes**

| **Items** | **Item8** | **Item 9** | **Item 10** | **Item 11** | **Item 12** | **Item 13** | **Item 14** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total agreement** | 96,8% | 93,7% | 95% | 95,2% | 93,7% | 88,9 | 81% |

Students' belief in this context is in line with previous studies in that the idea of permitting the use of translation is expected to make students, especially beginners, learn better by containing their fear and anxiety through providing a less tense atmosphere of learning (Buckmaster, 2000; Najduchowski, 2008; Swift, 2006). AS such, translation exercises in the light of students' welcoming stance of including them in reading classes is in line with the fact that translation could bring about progress on the level of building comprehension, enhancing participation and fostering self-confidence. Such elements are deemed very important for beginners to perform better in reading classes wherein levels of anxiety and fear in learners are likely to hinder understanding and affect students' performance negatively (Buckmaster, 2000).

## Conclusion

To conclude, the suggestion of incorporating translation-related exercises in beginners' reading comprehension lessons as a new way of pedagogically introducing L1 in EFL classes has been acclaimed by beginners in Moroccan middle schools. Interestingly, students' positive reactions towards doing translation exercises along with their welcoming views about including this type of reading activities in L2 classes indicate that this teaching strategy can be considered effective to make beginners build comprehension enhance their participation and foster self-confidence in reading comprehension classes. With these in mind, translation-related exercises have also been found to be important in improving students' overall performance in class.

## Recommendations

The above-mentioned results and findings about the inclusion of translation activities in L2 reading classes have significant implications for different contributors to the teaching of EFL, especially in Moroccan middle schools. With L1 officially banned in the Moroccan curriculum, foreign language policy makers are recommended to reconsider the banning of L1 use, particularly in middle schools where beginners take English classes for the first time. Based on the findings above, it is recommended that teacher trainings centers should pay attention to investing translation in reading classes of beginners. That is, teacher trainees are recommended to be trained on how to make use of students" L1 in their lesson planning. In the same context, EFL inspectors may want to reconsider reintroducing translation exercises in their pedagogical meetings and in-service trainings for middle school teachers. Inspectors along with teachers are recommended to be open to discussing the use of L1 as a pedagogical tool which can benefit learning and teaching Besides, EFL teachers in Moroccan middle schools may try translation-based exercises in reading classes along with other reading comprehension tasks. However, like any other research this paper has shown common limitations of context and participants. Despite these, the present paper could be regarded as a promising starting step for future research which can deeply examine more innovative ways of reintroducing students' first language in foreign language classes.

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